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# TRUE HISTORY

OF THE

# Massacre of Ninety-six Christian Indians,

AT

# GNADENHUETTEN, OHIO,

March 8th, 1782.

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# GNADENHUETTEN MASSACRE.

Alas! alas! for treachery! the boasting white men came
With weapons of destruction,—the sword of lurid flame:
And while the poor defenceless ones together bowed in prayer,
Unpitying they smote them while kneeling meekly there.

The cry of slaughter'd innocence went loudly up to heaven;
And can ye hope, ye murdering bands, ever to be forgiven?
We know not,—yet we ween for you the latest lingering prayer
That trembled on your victims lips, was, "God, forgive and spare!"

## HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

The first successful attempt at preaching the Gospel to the heathen Delawares, inhabiting the eastern section of the present state of Ohio, was made by the Moravian Missionary, David Zeisberger, in the spring of 1772; and in the course of a few years several flourishing congregations of Christian Indians were planted on the banks of the Tuscarawas River. But after the breaking out of the Revolutionary war in 1775, the Moravian Missionary establishments at Gnadenhuetten, Salem and Schoenbrunn on the Tuscarawas River, in Ohio, among the Indians, were frequently interrupted, and the faith and patience of the Missionary brethren and their Indian congregations often severely tried. As their religion taught them to cultivate the art of peace instead of war, and as they wished to preserve neutrality between the English and their Indian allies on the one hand, and the Americans on the other, they were subject to constant suspicion, and were treated in a hostile manner by both parties. The English Governor at Fort Detroit, influenced by the calumnies of their enemies, believed that the Christian Indians were partizans with the Americans, and that the Missionaries acted as spies. In order to rid himself of them, he sent a message to Pimoacan the half-king of the Wyandots, to take up the Indian congregations and their teachers, and carry them away. This man, instigated by the Delaware, Captain Pipe, a sworn enemy to the mission, at length agreed to commit this act of injustice.

In August 1781 a troop of warriors amounting to upwards of 300, commanded by the half-king, the Delaware Captain Pipe, and an English Captain Elliott, made their appearance at Gnadenhuetten to accomplish this cruel object. The half-king and his retinue put on the mask of friendship and proposed the removal of the Christian Indians as a measure dictated by a regard for their safety. This proposal they respectfully declined, promising, however, to consider their words, and return an answer, the next winter.

The half-king would probably have been satisfied with this answer had not the English officer Elliott, and Captain Pipe urged him to persevere. The consequence was that the hostile party became peremptory in their demands, and insisted on their removal. Their vengeance was particularly directed against the missionaries, and they held frequent consultations in which it was proposed to murder all the white brethren and sisters, and even the Indian assistants. Finally after much violence, and many barbarous cruelties they compelled the Christian Indians and their teachers to emigrate, leaving behind them a great quantity of corn in their stores, besides a large crop just ready to be gathered, together with potatoes and other vegetables and garden fruits.

In the beginning of October, 1781, the Missionaries, with the greater part of their congregation, arrived under the escort of the Wyandots at Sandusky. Here their savage conductors abandoned them, and loaded with plunder, returned to their homes, leaving them to shift for themselves in a country that was destitute of game, and every means of support. Pimoacan exulted in the accomplishment of his designs, and informed them that being now in his dominions, they were bound to obey his mandates, and commanded them to hold themselves in readiness to go to battle with him.

For a time the exiles roved to and fro, seeking a favorable locality for their stay over winter, and at length pitched upon a spot, situated on the East side of the Upper Sandusky, as the best they could find. Yet even here the country was dreary and barren, and they were at a loss to conceive whence the means of supporting so many should come during the winter which had already set in. Their small stock of provisions was nearly exhausted, and the missionaries had to depend upon the voluntary contributions of those members who had a little Indian corn left.

With their usual diligence, rising through faith above all disheartening trials, they commenced at once building huts for the winter.—During their labors their daily meetings were kept under the broad canopy of heaven. When the shadows of evening fell upon them, they seated themselves around fires in the open air; one of the missionaries delivering to the listening circle a short discourse. At times, some of the strolling savages would also attend, not to hear the gospel preached, but to scoff and laugh. What a sight! The genius of religion might hover over it, and point to the redeeming power which accompanied the cross of Christ! Wild Savages cleaving to the hope of eternal life amid all the ill fortune that seemed at every step to mark their christian pilgrimage! But their joy no man could take from them.

A message then came to them from the commandant at Detroit, that the Missionaries should quickly repair thither. Glad of the opportunity to exculpate themselves and refute the many lies propagated respecting them, four of the teachers, with several Indian brethren, obeyed the summons. They

appeared before the court martial at that place; their conduct was investigated, especially in relation to the imputed "correspondence with the rebels, and frustrating of the intended attacks of Indians upon the frontiers," and they were completely exonerated from all blame.*

The governor endeavored to atone for the ill treatment he had brought upon them, by every act of kindness. He provided them with suitable clothing and other necessaries, repurchased their watches for them, and parted from them with most marked expressions of esteem.

Thankful for the gracious interposition of God in their behalf, the Missionaries returned home, and were greeted with unbounded joy by their people, who had apprehended that they would be kept prisoners, as had also been the commandant's original intention. Notwithstanding their extreme poverty the following months were a joyful season to them, and they celebrated Christmas with cheerfulness and a blessing, in their newly built log-chapel.

The year 1782 had now commenced, and their situation was distressing in the extreme. A supply of 400 bushels of Indian corn which had been fetched from the deserted towns was again exhausted, and famine stared them in the face. Provisions of all kinds were wanting; corn was very scarce throughout the country, and such as had it asked a dollar for three or four quarts; the winter was unusually severe, and wood difficult to be obtained. The cattle began to die of hunger; and the congregation were driven to the necessity of supporting themselves upon their carcasses. In some instances babes perished for want of nourishment from their mothers' impoverished breasts.

In these deplorable circumstances, after due deliberation, the Indians came to the determination to return once more for food to their forsaken fields, where the corn was still standing. Having formed themselves into several divisions, they set out, in all about one hundred and fifty, men, women and children, the greater part to return no more, but to fall a sacrifice to the treachery and revenge of the white men in the notorious massacre at Gnadenhuetten.†

The actors in this foul transaction consisted of a military band of about one hundred men, from the western parts of

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*Dr. Doddridge in his Notes on the Indian Wars appears to me to have given credence to the charges of the Moravians having often sent runners to fort Pitt to give notice of the approach of war parties and so far violating the terms of neutrality, upon insufficient authority. It is not denied that the Christian Indians relieved the prisoners who were carried through their settlement, and often dissuaded their heathen kinsmen from pursuing their expedions, but their hearts were equally open to every other appeal of suffering humanity. It would appear strange that a circumstance like the one conceded by Dr. Doddridge should not have come to light before the tribunal at Detroit, confronted as they were with their enemies, the chief of whom, Captain Pipe, after some fruitless evasions, was obliged to confess, that he had calumniated them

†My authorities for the following narration are Zeisberger's Journal, Holmes' and Loskiel's Histories, Willet's Scenes in the Wilderness, and Doddridge's Notes.

Virginia and Pennsylvania, under the command of Col. David Williamson. The murder was premeditated; for their purpose was to proceed as far as Sandusky, in order to destroy all the Moravian Indians. Among the incentives to this expedition against a quiet and peaceable people, were the unusually early depredations of the savages upon the Ohio settlements, in the month of February, which, it is alleged, led to the conclusion that the murderers were either Moravians, or that the warriors had their winter quarters at their towns; in either case the Moravians being in fault, the safety of the frontier settlements required the destruction of their establishments. Besides the dismissal—of Shabosh and some Christian Indians, who had been captured in the fall, (by Col. Gibson of Pittsburg) which was but a common act of justice, gave great offence to the neighboring settlers. Men of the first standing in those parts, in consequence, volunteered to accompany Col. Williamson; each man furnishing himself with his own ammunition, and provisions, and many of them traveling on horseback.

Col. Gibson, of Fort Pitt—dispatched messengers, (as soon as he heard of the plot) to warn the Indians of the approaching danger, but they arrived too late. From another quarter, however, they received *timely* notice, but, unfortunately they thought the information unworthy of credit. So secure did they feel at their occupations, that they neglected all their usual precautions. Parties were at work in the cornfields, at each of the three settlements, Gnadenhuetten, Salem and Schoenbrunn. They had already made fine progress, and gathered a large quantity of grain, and were beginning to bundle up their packs in order to take their final leave of the places, when suddenly the militia made their appearance.

When within a mile of Gnadenhuetten, Col. Williamson's party had encamped for the night and reconnoitered their position. On the morning of the 6th of March the following plan for an assault was then devised. One half of the men were to cross the river, and attack the Indians who were at work in their cornfields on the West side, whilst the other half, being divided into three detachments, were to fall simultaneously from different quarters upon the village on the East side.—When the former division reached the river, they could not ford it, because it was high and filled with floating ice; but, observing something like a canoe on the opposite side, a young man of the party swam across, and brought over what proved to be a large sap trough. In this, going two by two, they commenced crossing, but impatient at the delay, a few got over, swimming at its side and holding fast to the edges. In this manner sixteen had crossed over, when the sentinels, who were in advance, discovered a lad, named Joseph Shabosh, the son of the assistant missionary, fired at him and broke one of his arms. The rest hastened to the spot, sending word by those who remained on the East side, for the other detachments to march upon Gnadenhuetten without a moment's

delay, supposing that the firing would have alarmed the inhabitants. With most piteous entreaties young Shabosh begged them to spare his life, representing that he was the son of a white man; but, regardless of his cries and tears, they killed him with their hatchets, and scalped him. After thus whetting their appetites in his warm life-blood, the party approached the plantations.

The first to discover their approach was an Indian named Jacob, a brother-in-law to young Shabosh, who was employed near the banks of the river, tying up his corn. Remaining unperceived, he was about to hail them, supposing them to be a friendly party, when at that instant they shot at one of the brethren who was just crossing the river from the town. Upon perceiving this, Jacob fled with the utmost precipitation, and before their faces were turned towards him, was out of sight. Had he acted with some coolness and courage, he might have saved many a valuable life; especially by proceeding to Salem, and giving the alarm. But instead of this, fear led him to flee several miles in an opposite direction, where he hid himself a day and a night.

The party of sixteen now drew near to the Indians, who were at work in the fields in considerable numbers, and had their guns with them, and finding that they were greatly outnumbered, accosted them in a friendly manner. They pretended to pity them on account of their past sufferings, said they had come to conduct them to a place of safety near Pittsburg; and advised them to discontinue their work at once, and return with them to the town to hold a further parley. To all this the Indians, anticipating no harm from *American* soldiers, and ignorant as yet of the murder of Shabosh, cheerfully acceded.—Not dreaming that they were to be caught "like fish in an evil net, and as birds that are caught in the snare," they rejoiced that they had found such true friends, and imagined they saw the hand of God in it,—who was about to put an end to all their suffering, and lead them to a more secure and pleasant country.

The other detachments had meanwhile arrived at the village, where they found but one man, and a woman, whom they shot, as she was hiding in the bushes. But so prepossessed were the Indians with the idea of removing that nothing was able to shake their confidence in the white men. They cheerfully surrendered their guns, hatchets and other weapons, upon receiving the promise that they should be restored at Pittsburg, showed them where they had secreted their communion wine and other property in the woods, helped them to pack it up, and began to make every preparation for the journey to Pittsburg.

The native assistant John Martin had gone to Salem, immediately upon the arrival of the party, to inform the inhabitants of the state of affairs; and the next day a troop of horsemen rode down to bring them all in. With the same confiding trust in their professions of peace and good will, they returned

with them, conversing on the road upon religious topics, in which their attendants joined with much appearance of piety. Simple children of the forest, how dove-like had Christianity made you! How little did you dream of deliberate deceit and base treachery, and that as sheep you were being led to the slaughter!—Arriving at the river bank opposite Gnadenhuetten, their eyes began to open, however, when it was too late. They discovered a spot of blood on the sand, which excited disquietude and alarm. Soon their boding fears received full confirmation. As soon as they entered the town all were seized, as those in town had been a short time before, their guns and pocket knives were taken by their conductors; they were pinioned, and confined in two houses standing some distance apart; the men in one, the women and children in the other. Here they met together—associates for the last time in sorrow. They mingled their tears and their sympathies together, and their prayers ascended to the throne of grace.

The miscreants now held a consultation, to decide the fate of the prisoners. The charges which they brought against them were, that their horses, as also their axes, pewter basins and spoons, and all they possessed had been stolen or obtained by improper means from the white people, and also that they were warriors, and not christians.—All of them were utterly false and frivolous. On the contrary it is presumable that the expedition would never have been undertaken, or at least not so imprudently conducted, if they had anticipated resistance. They well knew the pacific principles of the Moravian Indians, and calculated on blood and plunder without having a shot fired at them. With a mere show of defence it is likely that such men might have been repulsed. Some deeds of blood were no doubt, imputed to these Indians, for according to the statement of the missionaries, the Wyandot and Delaware warriors, who were inimical to the Gospel, had always made it a point to return from their campaigns through their settlements, in the expectation that it would bring the whites upon the Moravians. Some warriors, too, accompanied them on their return from Sandusky, crossed the Ohio and committed several murders, and on their way back stopped near Gnadenhuetten where they impaled a woman and child; but is equally certain that the Christians had no part or lot in the matter. Two of these warriors were captured at the same time, and were tomahawked outside of the town by the white men.—As to the other charge, it rested upon no other foundation than that one man is said to have found here the bloody clothes of his wife and children, which were plainly those of the woman and child killed near the town, and secreted here by their enemies. Others may have recognized property in the hands of the Indians, since it is probable that the warriors, in their passage through the villages, were in the habit of bartering various articles of value, for provisions, in lieu of money; but if this was contrary to their neutral engagements, it was unavoidable, as the warriors

possessed both the will and the means to compel them to give them whatever they wanted.

On such pretexts, the Indians were condemned to death. The blood-thirsty troops were clamorous to begin the butchery without delay. The officers hesitated. But can it be doubted, that if they had been really averse to the crime, they might have checked the vindictive spirit of their unprincipled subordinates? And had Col. Williamson been the *brave* man he is represented to have been, would he not have staked his life upon their defence, rather than that the unoffending and pious captives should perish? It was probably, therefore, more for the sake of appearances, and to devolve a part of the awful responsibility upon their men, than from any motives of mercy that they determined first to let it be put to a vote of the whole corps. Col. Williamson put the question, in form: "Whether the Moravian Indians should be taken prisoners to Pittsburg, or put to death;" and requested that all those who were in favor of saving their lives, should step out of their line and form a second rank. On this sixteen or eighteen stepped forward, and upwards of eighty remained. The fate of the Indians was thus decided on and they were told to prepare for death, a brief respite till the morrow being all that was granted them.

During the night the murderers then deliberated whether they should burn them alive or tomakawk and scalp them, and a few proposed milder measures; but the voice of mercy was overruled, and it was determined to butcher them one by one. The Indians were at first overwhelmed at the news of their impending fate. But quickly collecting themselves again, and patiently submitting to the inscrutable decree of the Lord whose servants they had become, they spent the night in prayer, asking pardon of each other for whatever offence they had given or grief they had occasioned, and exhorting one another to a faithful and meek endurance of their trials to the end. At the dawn of morning they then offered fervent supplications to God their Saviour, and united in singing praises unto Him, in the joyful hope that they should soon enter into His glorious presence, in everlasting bliss. In this hour the consolations of divine grace abounded in their souls; they felt the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and cheerfully resigned, they awaited the summons of their executioners.

It was the morning of the 8th of March when the awful scene was enacted. The murderers came to them whilst they were engaged in singing, and asked, "whether they were ready to die?" and received for answer, "that they had commended themselves to God, who had given them the assurance in their hearts that he would receive their souls."—The carnage then immediately commenced. By couples they were led bound into two houses that had been selected for the purpose, and were aptly termed the "Slaughter Houses," the men to the one, the women and children to the other, and

as they entered were knocked down and butchered. A Pennsylvanian of the party conducted the slaughter of the brethren. Taking up a cooper's mallet, (the house had been occupied by a cooper,) he said, looking at it, and handling it, "How exactly this will answer for the business." With this as the instrument of death, he continued knocking down one after the other, until he had killed fourteen with his own hands. He then handed the mallet to one of his fellow murderers, saying: "My arm fails me; go on in the same way; I think I have done pretty well."* Of the horrors that transpired in the house of the poor women and children we have no further account, than that a woman, called Christina, who had resided in Bethlehem, Pa., and could speak English well, fell upon her knees before the Captain, and begged him to spare their lives, but was told, it was impossible. So ferocious had they become that they were not satisfied with simply destroying their lives, but disfigured the dead and dying bodies in a horrible manner.

Thus perished at least ninety innocent persons, of all ages —from the grey haired sire down to the helpless innocent at its mother's breast. Leaving the houses which were now reeking with the blood and mangled remains of their victims, they went to a little distance, making merry over the horrid deed; but returning again, they saw one named Abel, who though scalped and mangled was attempting to rise, and dispatched him.

The whole number of the slain was ninety-six; of these some were killed before the general massacre, as Shabosh and his wife, and several who in attempting to escape by swimming the river were shot. Several warriors were likewise killed at the same time, outside of the town. Of the whole number of Moravian Indians forty were men, twenty two were women, and thirty four children. Five of the men were respectable native assistants: Samuel Moore, Tobias Jones, Isaac Glickican and John Martin. Samuel Moore and Tobias had been members of the congregation of that eminently devoted servant of God and most faithful missionary, David Brainerd. After his death they left New Jersey and joined the Moravians. Samuel had received his education from Brainerd, could read and was so well acquainted with the English language, that for many years he served in the capacity of interpreter. The others, also, bore excellent characters and were very useful members of the Church. Isaac Glickican had been a sachem, and was noted among his countrymen for superior wisdom and courage.

Only two lads of fourteen or fifteen years of age effected their escape from the hands of the murderers. One of these was knocked down and scalped with the rest in the slaughter house of the brethren. Recovering a little, he looked around, and beheld on all sides the mangled corpses of the dead.

*This was related by a lad who escaped out of the house, and who understood English well

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Among them he observed Abel attempting to rise, whom the white men, coming in soon afterwards, despatched. With great presence of mind he lay quite still among the heaps of slain, and when they had departed crept over the bodies to the door, still keeping himself in such a position as easily to feign death, if any person should approach. As it began to grow dusk, he quickly got out at the door, hid himself behind the house until it was quite dark and then escaped. The other lad had loosed his bonds, soon after it was ascertained that they were to die, succeeded in escaping out of the house where they were confined, and crept by a small cellar window under the house where the women were subsequently butchered. Here he remained undetected, and as the butchery proceeded, saw the blood flow in streams into the cellar. He kept himself concealed till evening, when he with much difficulty made his way out of the narrow window into the woods. These two met providentially, and staying a while to watch the movements of the white party, journeyed together to Sandusky.

The Indians who were gathering corn at Schoenbrunn were saved from the fate of their brethren. They had dispatched two brethren to Gnadenhuetten and Salem, carrying intelligence to them from the missionaries, on the day that the band arrived. These, on their way discovered to their great surprise the marks of horses' hoofs along and beside the path, and cautiously followed the tracks, until they found the body of Shabosh. They buried his body, and after observing that there were many white men in the village, and concluding from the fate of Shabosh that their brethren had all perished by the same cruel hands, hastily returned to Schoenbrunn. Here all took to instant flight, concealing themselves in the woods for some days, on the opposite side of the river. When the murderers arrived therefore upon the following day, they might easily have been discovered; but, being struck with an unaccountable blindness, and finding no trace of Indians, they soon rode off, after pillaging and burning the village.

In the same night of the massacre the white men set fire to all the houses of Gnadenhuetten, and to the slaughter houses among the rest. The dead bodies were but partially consumed, and their bones remained to bleach in the sun until after some twenty years they received interment by friendly hands. By the light of the burning village the murderers then departed, rending the air with shouts and yells more savage than ever arose in the wilderness before, carrying with them the scalps, about fifty horses, numerous blankets and some other articles of plunder, which they exposed to public sale in Pittsburg. On their way back they made another attack on an Indian settlement a short distance from Pittsburg, and were partially successful.

After a journey, attended with innumerable hardships, the Indians from Schoenbrunn arrived at Sandusky almost famished, having left all their provisions behind. They returned

to a dreary country; and to add to their distress, they returned to take another leave of their teachers. Well might they say with the patriarch Jacob, "All these things are against me." But they murmured not—they trusted in God, and took courage.

In conclusion, may the memory of our red brethren who at Gnadenhuetten sealed their faith with blood, ever remain; and may their pious confession of the saviour in suffering, their meek endurance, and triumphant Christian death, bear testimony to the Truth as it is in Jesus, as long as the memory of the atrocious deed shall last.

## THE GNADENHUETTEN MONUMENT.

In order to perpetuate the memory of the ninety-six Christian Indians, who, on the 8th of March, 1782, fell innocent victims to the savage ferocity of a lawless band of whites, and whose meek endurance of suffering, crowned with triumphant death, is worthy of commemoration, a society was formed and organized in October, 1843, having for its object the erection of a suitable monument on the spot where the massacre was perpetrated, near the present village of Gnadenhuetten, in Tuscarawas County, Ohio.

This Society having obtained the control of a part of the ground whereon the former Indian village of Gnadenhuetten stood, containing about six acres, and where the location of the slaughter houses can still be identified, has fenced it in, cleared off the underbrush with which it was overgrown, and in other respects improved and beautified it.

The Society begs leave to state that all funds heretofore collected for this object have been carefully and judiciously invested, and now amount to about $900. But this amount is inadequate to effect the end in view; it therefore asks aid from the public generally, guaranteeing that when sufficient funds are raised they will have erected a plain but durable monument on the spot where the massacre was committed. Any donations for the purpose will be gratefully received and acknowledged by any of the officers of the Society.

The officers of the Gnadenhuetten Monument Society are

JACOB BLICKENSDERFER, *President.*

WILLIAM HAMILTON, *Vice President.*

SOLOMON STOCKER, *Secretary.*

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